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While the interpersonal relationship between the student and teacher is important for learning, the specific quality of the student-teacher relationship in higher education and its effects on learning remains understudied. Striving to enliven this area of study is the concept of the teaching alliance as understood through Jesuit tradition. The alliance defines the quality of the student-teacher relationship as the degree of shared agreement over the goals and tasks of a course, as well as the presence of a positive interpersonal bond. Through an Ignatian lens, this framework brings into focus themes in teaching that can bolster learning. This article offers an illustrative example in a graduate-level course for additional reflection upon the practical application of the alliance framework. It ends with pedagogical considerations and an agenda for further scholarship.

Keywords

   teaching alliance, student-teacher relationship, Jesuit education, teaching, Jesuit pedagogy

At the heart of teaching is the relationship between an instructor and his or her student (Tennant & Cathi, 2009). Through that relationship, student change and growth is possible. Surprisingly, this topic remains categorically understudied in higher education, and more systematic analyses of interpersonal variables—like the student-teacher relationship and its effects on learning outcomes—are practically nonexistent. Meanwhile, scholars are converging on the idea that a quality 21st-century education involves deeper-level learning (Kirby & Lawson, 2012), which has been linked to instructional practices that are student- or learner-centered—an umbrella comprised of postmodern-constructivist teaching strategies carried out vis-à-vis a positive and collaborative relationship between student and teacher. With a relation-

ally centered teaching philosophy spanning 500 years, Jesuit-inspired educa-tion can serve as a catalyst for additional, much-needed scholarship focused on the interpersonal dimension of collegiate teaching and learning.

In this paper, the psychological-interpersonal concept of the alliance (Bordin, 1994) is proposed as a model that has synergistic potential with Jesuit tradition to promote theoretically driven practices in the college class-room designed to strengthen the quality of the student-teacher relationship. That relationship is operationalized by three empirically derived factors: (a) mutually shared learning goals, (b) mutually shared tasks or activities, and (c) a positive interpersonal bond. By projecting this model through the prism of Ignatian philosophy and then examining its theoretical underpinning and dis-cussing its application in a graduate course in education, two factors come into clearer focus: (1) interpersonal strategies for teaching, and (2) a research agenda that is relationally focused. Expanding this literature can help advance learner-centered education and the Jesuit tradition of facilitated-guided learning.

The Student-Teacher Relationship and Learner-Centered Higher Education

Interdisciplinary evidence has shown that an academic curricula that engages students in meaningful ways is linked to high quality learning. Ac-cording to Kirby and Lawson (2012), high quality learning involves exposing students to a broad array of information that gets meaningfully integrated with existing schemas and beliefs, ultimately triggering further interest in acquiring new knowledge independently. Educational scholars associate such deep-level learning with instructional methods that are driven by principles of information integration, self-regulation, cooperation, and motivation (Nilson, 2010; Weimer, 2013; Zimmerman, 2002); in essence, by teaching to stimulate a fuller range of cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes using a students' own interests, existing knowledge, as well as life experiences. In this way, high quality learner-centered education can be understood as hing-ing on an instructor's ability to cultivate a close and collaborative working relationship with his/her students.

According to Weimer (2013), learner-centered teaching relies heavily on an instructor adopting a facilitative professional stance with students. Get-ting students to engage in participatory activities like journaling, small-group discussions, or community involvement, and guiding them through a pro-cess of discovering learning remains the cornerstone of facilitative teaching (Biggs, 1999; Weimer, 2013)—but no means easy tasks. With adult learners,

compared to primary and secondary students, meaningful engagement involves considering factors like lived experiences and numerous social identities, as well as a need for autonomy and decision-making (Nilson, 2010; Vella, 1994). Not accounting for these variables can trigger disinterest and a sense of alienation from the curriculum that can compromise the overall learning experience (Vella, 1994).

There exist, fortunately, postmodern frameworks of teaching in the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences that promote methods characterized by egalitarianism, collaboration, transparency, and a shared responsibility for learning (e.g., Cheshire, 2013; Collins & Pieterse, 2007). And while models of rapport and mentoring (Rogers, 2009) as well as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) have added value to relationship building in the classroom, researchers have also articulated a continuing need for a more comprehensive and multidimensional tool that can give educators a better conceptual foothold on relational dynamics with postsecondary students (Rogers, 2009). Without such a tool, extending a theory-driven, empirically informed practice of teaching is ultimately stifled.

The Alliance in the Classroom

Numerous scholars (Jones, Mirsalimi, Conroy, Horne-Moyer, & Burrill, 2008; Myers, 2008; Rogers, 2009; Ursano, Kartheiser, & Ursano, 2007) have promoted the concept of the teaching alliance as a comprehensive yet parsimonious model that can help college-level educators assess and strengthen the quality of their relationship with adult students as they employ a range of participatory activities. The teaching alliance is essentially defined by three factors: (a) mutually shared learning goals, (b) mutually shared tasks or activities, and (c) a positive interpersonal bond. The dyadic exchange between instructor and student in these three dimensions fortifies the alliance, yielding deep changes in the learner.

An impressive body of research related to psychological counseling has shown that a significant degree of change in a client is driven by the counselor's ability to demonstrate professional flexibility, affirmation of the learner's strengths, and an equalization or redistribution of power (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001)—qualities that comprise the popular notion of the "relationship factor" (Wampold, 2000), a defining feature of the empirically supported approach known as learner- or client-centered therapy (Hill, 2014; Rogers, 1980). Thus, as an educational construct, the alliance reflects the

social milieu believed to be key for postsecondary and re-entry students to experience meaningful learning (e.g., Nilson, 2010; Vella, 1994); however, the scant literature on the alliance outside the counseling context limits the generalizability of extant findings to other settings. Moreover, the model's success and longevity in one field of education juxtaposed with just a handful of works in another, combined with the overall small body of literature focused on college teaching as a relational endeavor, suggests moderating agents at a more distal, institutional level worth examining at this time.

Challenges in Implementing a Relationally Oriented Agenda

There is consensus among scholars (e.g., D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991) that what happens in class is shaped by the values and beliefs comprising the outer rings of education. College instruction has a history of being closely associated with traditional, didactic teaching, and the tendency for departments to hire instructors who can cater to course content and risk management can inadvertently maintain the status quo (Lyons, McIntosh, & Kysilka, 2003). In 1989, Fong noted that the value placed on research, content-over-process, and accreditation standards can have a short-circuiting effect on attempts by instructors to develop a more facilitative, relationally attuned practice of teaching, much less a truly cohesive understanding of the interpersonal dimension of teaching and learning. A study by Bok (2006) out of the University of Texas found that 88% of the teaching time of its instructors was spent on lecturing to students. Priester et al. (2008) analyzed course curricula at the graduate level and found a similar didactic trend. They recommended, in fact, that the teaching alliance be the focus of additional scholarship to help elevate the interpersonal dimension of classroom learning. They also pointed out, as others have (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Fong, 1989; Gay, 2010), that sustaining such efforts are best when an interpersonal philosophy of education emanates not just from the individual instructor but also from the institution itself—its values and traditions.

The teaching alliance has been conceptualized with undergraduate students (Myers, 2008), medical trainees (Ursano et al., 2007), and rehabilitation counselors (Koch, 2004). However, a wider educational philosophy that can help root the alliance firmly within a postsecondary setting remains unexamined. Thus, we have a unique opportunity to imagine the alliance within a Jesuit vision of higher education, which is steeped in over 500 years of tradition in guided-facilitative teaching; this is reviewed in the next section. Then,

with an Ignatian philosophy front and center, the theoretical underpinning of the teaching alliance is further unpacked and an illustrative example of its use in a graduate course is discussed, revealing themes in facilitative teaching and guideposts for future scholarship.

Jesuit-Inspired Education

Recent attention has focused on the first Jesuit Pope, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, and his humility, sincerity, and overall interest in strengthening his human connection with others (Otterman, 2014; Rodriguez, 2013). As a member of the Society of Jesus, Pope Francis fundamentally reflects the traditions of Ignatius of Loyola, an early 16th-century Jesuit who found his mission in living with and for God by cultivating exercises rooted in self-reflection and companionship. The Spiritual Exercises, as they are known, helped Ignatius of Loyola develop a practice of prayer that helped him and his companions meet and converse with God's living spirit out of individual freedom, not out of pressure or fear. The Exercises, compiled in the form of a handbook, provided a framework for contemplating the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus through meditations that were carefully guided by a spiritual companion who assisted the "retreatant" in cultivating discernment, or a process for making choices using prayer, reflection, consultation, and the entirety of a persons' experience (Traub, 2008).

The Spiritual Exercises are the bedrock for Ignatian-inspired teaching and remind us that education is not simply a cognitive venture but rather a communal journey comprised of "rigorous exercises of the spirit wholly engaging the body, mind, heart and soul of the human person" (International Center for Jesuit Education, 1993, p. 8). Over the centuries and across 35 General Congregations (GC), the Society of Jesus has advanced St. Ignatius's legacy by promoting a vision that "seeks to find the divine in all things—in all peoples and cultures, in all areas of study and learning, in every human experience . . . [and] empowers people to become leaders in service, men and women for others" (Traub, 2008, p. 395). The latest GC (2008) affirmed that Jesuits are to find identity "not alone but in companionship: in companionship with the Lord, who calls, and in companionship with others who share this call" (Decree 2, n.3, p. 17). Boryczka and Petrino (2012) understood such a decree as fueling a relationally oriented ethos in Jesuit higher learning.

Ignatian Jesuit philosophy, wrote Mitchell (2008), espouses a reverence for the learner and his/her unique contributions, setting a climate at all stages of

the educational pipeline governed by the belief that "no matter how large or complex the institution, the individual is important and given as much personal attention as humanly possible, both in and out of the classroom" (p. 112). This learner-centered spirit is quintessentially embodied in the Jesuit pillars of (a) the education of the whole person and (b) Ignatian pedagogy.

Educating the Whole Person

In a 2011 article, Currie examined the Jesuit identity and mission of 28 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities and found that the phrase "Educating the Whole Person" was consistently found in those schools' mission, second only to the words "Jesuit" and "Catholic." The idea of the education of the whole person derives from *cura personalis*, or care for the individual person, which is thought to have facilitated the efforts of St. Ignatius in carefully tailoring the Spiritual Exercises to the needs of those he guided, his companions.

Manning (2014) identified four learner dimensions that give educators access to the whole student, like the corporeal dimension and the self-defeating attitudes that students tend to have toward an array of physical experiences. The affective dimension focuses on harvesting emotional states like tranquility and peace, whereas the volitional dimension addresses motivation for life learning. Last, expanding the sense of imagination and creativity is the focus of the cognitive dimension, and further evidence for the value placed on an educator who "establishes a personal relationship with the students, listens to them in the process of teaching, and draws them toward personal initiative and responsibility for learning" (Traub, 2008, p. 391).

Ignatian Pedagogy

Additional inspiration can be found in the idea of pedagogy, or the "the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques" (Simon, 1987, p. 371). In 1993, The International Center for Jesuit Education (ICJE) articulated an educational paradigm focused on the full growth of a person that, if truly successful, would ultimately result "in a radical transformation not only of the way in which people habitually think and act, but of the very way in which they live in the world" (p. 7).

Ignatian pedagogy is not limited to developing disciples of God but is useful across a wide range of academic disciplines (Boryczka & Petrino, 2012). It centers on three overarching processes: (a) experience, (b) reflection, and

(c) action. In other words, classroom instruction is guided by the belief that each student brings to class a perspective informed by a priori feelings, values, insights, and intuition, which facilitate deeper, meaningful learning. In order for this to happen, however, the students themselves must be able to connect their own experiences to the course content, necessitating a focus on teaching and encouraging reflective skills. When meaningful learning is experienced, an internal drive gets triggered, which then cultivates a desire for additional change.

These three factors lie "at the heart of the Ignatian pedagogy. It is our way of proceeding in Jesuit schools as we accompany the learner on his or her journey of becoming a fully human person" (ICJE, 1993, p. 10). Korth (2008) offered a practical, transdisciplinary set of guidelines that can help instructors with implementation. Korth (2008) also noted the diverse possibilities given "the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm applies to all curricula and students of all ages and backgrounds . . . [and] needs to be adapted and applied to our own specific situations" (p. 284).

Thrust for More Interpersonal Teaching

Ignatian pedagogy and the notion of educating the whole person are forces emanating from Jesuit institutions of higher learning that percolate a communal spirit of learning into every classroom. St. Ignatius facilitated among his companions meaningful growth by establishing relationships punctuated by collaboration, information sharing, and even vulnerability—features increasingly and empirically associated with desired student outcomes. Furthering the study of the student-teacher relationship in higher education is important for the development of learner-centered education, and Jesuit tradition can add critical philosophical thrust to that endeavor.

Through the natural exchange between a student and professor working to establish a shared agreement over the learning goals and activities needed to reach those goals, as well as through the collaborative efforts to maintain a positive interpersonal bond, the alliance model might help educators implement more theory-driven strategies targeting the dyadic student-teacher relationship and, in the process, manifest a Jesuit spirit of education. A review of the extant literature lends support to this perspective, as does as anecdotal evidence from its implementation in a graduate-level course in counseling, which is discussed next.

The Teaching Alliance

The teaching alliance reflects the premise championed by Tennant and Cathi (2009) that the student-instructor relationship is at the heart of teaching. The teaching alliance is based on the idea that a positive and supportive relational milieu is necessary for desired change to occur. In *Freedom to Learn* (1994), the well-known humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers wrote, "The facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and learner" (p. 106). Psychologist Edward Bordin, with his work on the therapeutic or working alliance, helped advance the understanding of those relational qualities within a professional mental health relationship.

Bordin (1994) held the perspective that the positive interpersonal milieu in counseling between the counselor and client made it possible for clients to fully engage treatment and successfully experience the change that he or she was seeking. Bordin (1994) understood that the professional dyad was rooted in an a priori set of conditions and procedures. Grounded in that reality, he identified three dimensions that bound the counselor and client: (a) goals, (b) tasks, and (c) the bond. Specifically, he contended that mutual endorsement between counselor and client over the goals of counseling and the tasks involved in achieving the goals had complementary effects on the professional relational milieu. Further enhancement of that milieu was observed when trust and respect typified the patterns of interpersonal attachment, or the relational bond, between counselor and client. The interpersonal patterns associated with engaging the alliance, according to Bordin (1994), generated the necessary amount of relational leverage needed to counteract strains resulting naturally between two people during the delicate process of human change.

The idea of the alliance has generated an impressive body of research in the mental health field (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001). Hovarth (1994) described the tripartite framework as an optimal way to conceptualize and measure the strength of partnership between two people in a professional counseling setting. Regarding the college classroom, Koch (2004) articulated the alliance between a student and a teacher in the following way:

> Tasks are in class behaviors and cognitions that form the substance of the learning process. In a well functioning class both teacher and students perceive these tasks as relevant and efficacious. Furthermore, each must accept the responsibility to perform the tasks. A strong

alliance is also characterized by mutually endorsing and valuing the goals (outcomes) that are the target of the class. Finally, the concept of bonds embraces the complex network of positive personal attachments that exist among the students and the teacher, including issues such as mutual trust, acceptance, and confidence. (p. 237)

Bringing Jesuit tradition to the foreground, each dimension of the alliance is further examined within an academic setting. This is followed by an illustrative example to support reflection by the reader on practical applications.

Goals

For learning goals to have complementary effects on the relational milieu in class, they must be developmentally appropriate for the person seeking change (Koch, 2004). Ignatius himself was known to help people in the manner of Jesus and the early disciples by making himself available to people where they were and as they were (Society of Jesus, 2008). By way of helping align learning goals and student readiness, the teaching alliance can enhance the interpersonal attunement between student and teacher.

Like the adage says, "Meet your students where they are." To do so requires an instructor get to know his or her students first, otherwise it is difficult to explore goals that a student will find personally relevant and meaningful. According to Ignatian pedagogy, meaningful learning is achieved when a student's personal experience—as shaped by family, peers, and other social networks—are tied to educational goals (Korth, 2008). Additionally, Jesuit pedagogy maintains that the student is a producer of knowledge and not simply a bank for the teacher to transfer knowledge into (Boryczka & Petrino, 2012). Therefore, cultivating shared agreement with students around goals might be seen as occurring in a collaborative, open, and ongoing process carried out through one-on-one or small-group discussions.

Tasks

Establishing mutual agreement over the activities that a student has to undertake to reach a goal can also enhance the student-teacher relationship (Myers, 2008). Therapy, for example, often requires clients to access traumatic memories and openly discuss highly sensitive information. In that setting, not offering the client the opportunity to understand the objectives of a task and the skills required to successfully engage in those tasks can increase

the risk that the client might not fully commit to a set of learning activities, therefore compromising the change process.

Just like the highly variable nature of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatian-inspired teaching is characterized by assignments ranging from private self-reflection to public service. These types of activities are generally considered participatory, meaning that knowledge is created out of an interaction between the individual and his/her environment, or across intra- and interpersonal levels (Kolb, 1984). Ignatian pedagogy encourages teachers to loosen rigid expectations for uniformity in student performance and instead collaboratively explore with them a healthy range of tasks that peak their interest, thereby potentially triggering an internally motivated drive for ongoing learning (Boryczka & Petrino, 2012). Transparent and communal discussions with students on curricular issues can cultivate an awareness of the actual process of education.

Bond

Jesuit educational tradition sees a positive interpersonal bond between teacher and student as vital for human development. A rather straightforward premise, it is complicated by a priori conditions like the procedural, administrative, and hierarchical nature of teaching. The teaching alliance, however, works within these constraints, mainly through the efforts between teacher and student to establish shared agreement over the course goals and tasks, which in-turn cultivate a sense of mutual respect, trust, and affirmation (Koch, 2004; Ursano et al., 2007).

Ignatian pedagogy is considered a humanistic approach to education because it centralizes the student and his or her unique experience in the learning process (Boryczka & Petrino, 2012). Taking interest in a student and his or her perspective begins on the first day of class. For example, Brown and Perry (2011) discussed the relational benefits of collaboratively exploring with students norms and guidelines for safe participation in a graduate-level counselor education class. The authors emphasized the importance of gathering the students' opinions on what they themselves believed were important group norms. Through the natural process of establishing agreement over goals and tasks, the relational bond is imbued with mutual trust and respect that can safeguard the delicate process of learning.

The Teaching Alliance in a Graduate-Level Course

Useful at this point might be an illustrative example of how the teaching alliance can be used in the classroom. The alliance, by its very definition, will vary based on student and teacher characteristics and also the course type and pedagogical choices. Therefore, the aim of the next section is to highlight themes that have emerged as a result of incorporating the alliance model in my own graduate-level course in counseling. I discuss three course components: (a) the course, (b) the syllabus, and (c) instructional tendencies. I conclude with a summary and offer recommendations for additional scholarship.

The course. The course I teach is a 3-unit graduate course titled *Multicultural Counseling* offered every semester by the Department of Educational Support Services. Multicultural counseling is part of the core curriculum for the 60-unit master's counseling degree. The course is open to students from other educational programs with an average enrollment of 20 students per semester. The curriculum targets the development of professional multicultural competency, which is understood to be the ongoing acquisition of culturally driven knowledge and self-awareness, as well as learning techniques and strategies that are culturally relevant to a diverse range of clients (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The textbook is the popular *Counseling the Culturally Diverse by Sue* and Sue (2013), which is now in its sixth edition. Accordingly, the curriculum covers a range of topics, at times highly sensitive, related to counseling as impacted by social institutions, power and oppression, unique histories of marginalized groups, cultural identity development, and advocacy and social justice.

The syllabus. On the first day of class, the students review the objectives of the course and are introduced to the idea of the teaching alliance in the syllabus. In there it states:

> Multicultural growth is enhanced when there is a positive interpersonal climate in the class. I value the alliance, or relationship I have with each of my students. I understand a strong alliance to be mutual agreement with you over the goals and tasks of the course, as well as a positive relational bond. To that end, I am committed to working openly and collaboratively with you on tailoring the broader learning objectives to address your individual needs. Maintaining a strong alliance requires effort, and I invite each of you to join me in those efforts.

Emphasis on the individual needs of the student is made explicit, and assignments are designed with flexibility in mind, which naturally leads to a discussion of goals and tasks. For example, in the syllabus, four components comprise each graded assignment: description, requirement, suggestions, and evaluation. To illustrate, the group presentation assignment is described as a formal presentation on counseling issues related to an underserved population. Students are told they will be given about a dozen groups to choose from based on race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status. The learning objectives are described broadly, as in "Students will gain a multidimensional view of diverse persons and potential clients," which lays the foundation to have open exchanges related to tailoring the learning. The explicit requirements of the assignment help provide structure and consistency, and include having to present for 30 minutes and distributing an educational brochure. The third component serves as a general template for the assignment and includes suggestions like presenting on sociohistorical events, effective and ineffective forms of counseling, and reviewing at least one social justice issue. Students are invited to expand on each suggestion, first in private reflection and then in small-group discussion. Last, the evaluation component outlines broad areas of student assessment, such as: "Communicating awareness of sensitive or important issues relevant to the selected population."

Incorporating the teaching alliance helps create room and flexibility in the curriculum for students to actively search for greater meaning. Across five graded assignments, students have multiple opportunities to impact the learning objectives and course activities (i.e., goals and tasks) based on their individual interests and needs. This, I have found, encourages that communication be kept open between a student and myself, thereby also strengthening my overall connection and bond with them.

Instruction. The instructional approach I employ is inspired by Ignatian pedagogy, resulting in frequent use of self-reflective activities that incorporate a fuller range of experiences, worldviews, and predispositions. Participatory assignments include small-group presentations and at least one cultural immersion or community service assignment. Given the focus of the content, the course is also supported by critical-multicultural pedagogy (Brotherton, 1996), which emphasizes an open and honest examination of counseling as affected by forces like cultural politics, economics, and oppression.

Adopting a facilitator stance in class helps to implement the teaching alliance. A collaborative spirit characterizes the discussions around the assign-

ments, specifically the learning objectives and tasks. Using overarching goals, students are invited to reflect on their full experience as multicultural beings and explore modifications to the assignment that would enhance their educational experience. Students are asked to share their ideas with me through reflective journaling. These efforts coalesce into a vibrant energy where students feel that their experience matters and that they have an active role in shaping their education, which is considered key in education with adults (Vella, 1994).

The teaching alliance leads me to repeatedly ask myself: *Why?* This takes discussions that I have with students far beyond the common practice of allowing them to choose a topic to present on, or select a community site in which to immerse themselves. For example, in my class, some students can have difficulty recognizing and verbalizing the multidimensional nature of culture. Evidence of this trouble might be in a student's tendency to use general labels without qualifiers during culturally oriented discussions in class, such as saying "Asian(s)," with little mention of "Asian Americans" or "South-East Asian," or saying "gay(s)" with few or zero instances of mentioning other sexual minority groups. Cultivating a strong alliance means exploring whether that tendency is due to a restricted range of knowledge, or perhaps an attitudinally based issue. Perhaps most importantly, the focus on the alliance guides my student and me to collaboratively search for meaningful modifications to the learning objective or task to address a learning gap. Differences of opinions related to goals or tasks, while uncomfortable at times, have a tendency to open new lines of inquiry that can reveal important information, thus helping direct the learning and further strengthening the interpersonal bond.

In what Ursano et al. (2007) referred to as the *educational diagnosis,* the ongoing evaluation of a student's learning needs by way of goals and tasks is key to unlocking a deeper bond with students. In my experience, the typical student sees the a priori goals and task as generally satisfactory. However, when given the chance, many still find ways to enhance their learning by tapping into their strengths and areas of interests. Multiculturalism can be a challenging subject for some students, but group discussions around goals and tasks seems to foster an open and trust-filled process that allows students to experience a vulnerability that, without it, might foreclose the potential for future growth.

Further Considerations of the Alliance in an Educational Setting

There is a need to better understand the interpersonal milieu in learner-centered education. Nested in Jesuit tradition, the teaching alliance brings to focus pedagogical themes that can help fortify and further inspire one's facilitative practice with students. Figure 1, below, illustrates this along with some emerging themes, which are expanded upon below:
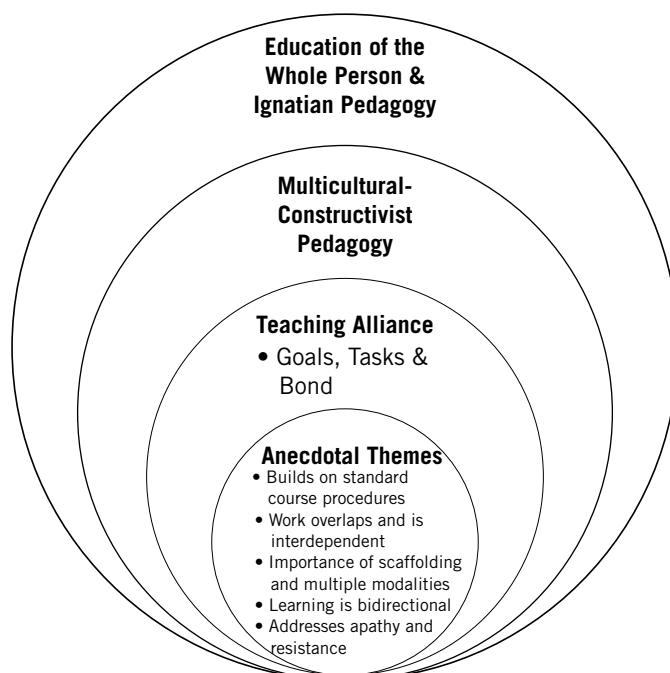
Education of the
Whole Person &
Ignatian Pedagogy

Multicultural-
Constructivist
Pedagogy

Teaching Alliance
• Goals, Tasks &
  Bond

Anecdotal Themes
• Builds on standard
  course procedures
• Work overlaps and is
  interdependent
• Importance of scaffolding
  and multiple modalities
• Learning is bidirectional
• Addresses apathy and
  resistance

Figure 1. Synergism across educational strata and the resulting themes.

- Elements naturally found in the educational process (e.g., course activities, learning objectives) are understood within a relational framework, which facilitates implementing interventions without generating substantially more work, even in classes with enrollment over 20.
- Attending to the goals and tasks can strengthen the interpersonal bond, and vise versa, giving the alliance model an interdependent quality.
- The teaching alliance encourages the use of participatory activities and multiple modalities of teaching, which tend to be associated with constructivist forms of teaching (e.g., Brotherton, 1996).

- The bidirectional nature of the learning process becomes evident during differences of opinion, which can lead to a deeper connection between student and teacher.
- The teaching alliance exhibits a unifying quality that allows for the use of various pedagogical models, therefore amenable for use in a variety of courses.
- Many students benefit from the alliance, particularly students who are feeling challenged by the course content.

Above all, the teaching alliance generates excitement and curiosity among students surrounding their educational experiences. By drawing attention to a fuller range of experiences and promoting active exploration for greater meaning, true to the Jesuit spirit, the teaching alliance can help optimize the student-teacher relationship and potentially the link between practice and outcome.

Charting a Research Agenda

Looking ahead, the tripartite alliance model has the potential to generate empirical research on relational factors important for quality learning outcomes, as it has already done for the psychotherapeutic field. There, the evidence seems to favor a flexible approach to counseling focused on culturally congruent goals (Wampold, 2000) as well as a direct exploration of negative interpersonal feelings with an open, nondefensive stance (Safran & Muran, 2000). Counselor attributes like rigidity and tenseness have also been associated with a weakened alliance (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001), and a weakened alliance has been correlated to premature termination of counseling (Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989). Because interpersonal ruptures also occur between teacher and student (Rogers, 2009), the teaching alliance can help deepen the understanding for how relational variables impact educational outcomes.

As with any model, limitations exist that can impact how the alliance is further studied in an academic setting. The teaching alliance focuses on the dyadic relationship between student and instructor despite the classroom being comprised of various other relational networks. The alliance can also result in sensitive student information being disclosed, which suggests the importance for an instructor to know how to respond appropriately and within his or her professional scope. In such cases, perhaps establishing clear boundaries and making use of university resources are important strategies to implement (see

Rogers, 2009). Lastly, given the open nature of the activities and ostensibly little structure, the teaching alliance, as with learner-centered education overall, can feel daunting to study not to mention to implement. Fortunately, useful resources can help enhance instructional competency surrounding less didactic and more engaging forms of teaching (e.g., McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2002).

Qualitatively, scholars might consider exploring the subjective experience of the alliance for both students and teachers. A phenomenological inquiry, for example, might reveal the meaning ascribed to the alliance by students. It can also shed light on the unique processes that instructors employ to attend to various aspects of the student-instructor relationship. Quantitatively, scholars might consider using the Teaching Alliance Inventory (TAI; Jones et al., 2008) to measure the strength of the dyadic relationship and explore associations with other relevant variables. The TAI is a 22-item, Likert measure created with ratings from master's and doctoral students in counseling. Scores on the TAI have been positively associated with overall teaching effectiveness including rapport building, teaching clarity, and group facilitation (Jones et al., 2008). Future research might also explore the utility for the alliance to explain learning outcomes within specific disciplines. For example, it would be useful to know how the quality of the student-teacher relationship affects a student's overall classroom experience. A rubric for evaluation and benchmarking might also contribute to practical use as well as empirical research.

Conclusion

Martin (2014) and others (Montenajo, 2010) have noted that scholarship emerging out of Catholic-Jesuit educational institutions would be well suited for cross-disciplinary work that joins efforts around wider educational issues. Doing so is critical for the teaching enterprise in college, where many educators are left to address complex interpersonal dynamics using a hodge-podge of strategies largely based on personal experience and a *see-one-do-one* approach to teaching. By conceptualizing the student-teacher relationship as a positive bond between the two and their mutual agreement over course goals and tasks, the teaching alliance model is helping me develop a learner-centered teaching practice and overall stronger, more meaningful relationships with my students that uphold the Jesuit values and principles. It is facilitating innovative yet practical ways for me to enact the experience-reflection-action approach espoused by Ignatian pedagogy, further helping to unlock

Jesuit tradition in a contemporary educational setting. As a scholar, I find that the alliance model is leading me to new questions about the true impact of the student-teacher relationship in the classroom, and the institutional support received has added thrust to such research projects.

There is much more to know about teaching that is centered on the learner and his/her relationship with the instructor. The teaching alliance model, nested within Jesuit philosophy, has a synergistic quality that others are encouraged to experience and explore. With additional scholarship, educators from a variety of disciplines will be able to determine for themselves the degree of utility of the teaching alliance model to promote instructional methods and applied research that is truly student-centered.

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